

# EQA REPORT

May 30, 2008

Dear Parents and Community Members,

I am writing to you today to let you know about the wonderful work our teachers do every day in our schools. The work we committed to three years ago was validated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the publication of the EQA report for 2007 released several weeks ago.

This report is one of the best and most positive reports ever written by EQA on the work of a school district to rebuild programs and school climate in order to close the achievement gaps identified in their Tier II and Tier III reports.

The complete report is accessible on the EQA website (<http://eqa.mass.edu/home/index.asp>). I have listed the major findings of the report below:

## **FINDINGS**

During their visit members of the EQA team identified **four** general findings and **eighteen** corresponding findings directly related to the six turnaround plan initiatives; these findings are listed below:

<b>I. The leadership has set clear priorities for developmentally appropriate and sustainable improvements.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The district's vision, mission and goals have created both an alignment of and a clear direction for the Southbridge school system.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The district provided developmental levels of support each year to build principal and teacher capacity to analyze data, in order to precipitate planned actions at the school and classroom levels.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• District goals and plans are continually refined through active and inclusive participation throughout the district.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The district has begun to build the structure for curricular improvements.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Although the district has not yet determined quantitative benchmarks to measure progress in meeting some goals, the superintendent intends to use quantitative formative benchmarks to measure growth in student achievement in the future.</li></ul>

<b>II. The district is aggressively building capacity at all levels to create newly established structures and practices.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southbridge has built the leadership capacity to improve the school system.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The once-troubled special education program has been revamped.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new curriculum development process is focused on strengthening standards-based instruction.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development and planning support instructional improvements, although this is still an evident area of priority.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development in Southbridge supports teacher implementation of the curriculum.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher supervision and evaluation processes have not yet caught up with the new instructional expectations and administrator training.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district established new measures to improve fiscal management, although improvements are still needed in this area.</li> </ul>

<b>III. The leadership has set the stage for ownership and cooperation in the implementation of the turnaround plan through its communication with the school committee, town, and staff, and by fully engaging the staff in improvement efforts.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The School Committee has established new ways of operating that support district improvement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement in town officials' level of support for the district was evident despite district-town relationships remaining an area of sensitivity.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district had the financial resources needed to implement the turnaround plan.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district generated staff understanding and ownership in carrying out its initiatives.</li> </ul>

<b>IV. The district has been working to better engage the community and parents, although this area is still a work in progress.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Superintendent reestablished connections with parents and community organizations and attempted to engage these constituencies in the decision-making process.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently the effectiveness of efforts to improve parent communication and parent involvement is unclear.</li> </ul>

This is very good news for us and is a strong indication that we have built the appropriate foundations to sustain our work for years to come. The findings in the report will be the springboard of our next phase in our Turnaround to remove the status of “underperforming” from our district. Next year we will focus on the best practices of instruction and determine where we will set the bar for student achievement.

It is important and exciting work we have committed to and I look forward to continuing on this path with you next year.

Sincerely,

*Dale M. Hanley*

Dale M. Hanley, Ed.D.  
Superintendent